

COMMENTS

ON

POLISH AFFAIRS

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CONTINUING THE STORY OF EAST PRUSSIA

Certain economic information about East Prussia was presented in an earlier issue of this bulletin. To decide on the proper disposition of that territory after the war, it is necessary also to consider historical and political facts. The following is an attempt to set forth, as clearly as can be done in a brief space, a story which began eight hundred years ago, when seeds were planted which still bear fruit.

The Polish state in the eleventh century included Pomerania, the land extending along the Baltic from the Vistula to the Oder. The name Pomerania is from the Polish "Pomorze", meaning "along the sea." The Germans, centered in Brandenburg, were even then beginning their Drang nach Osten and western Pomerania later fell into their hands.

East of the Vistula the Poles were separated from the sea by the pagan Prussians, who were in no way connected with the German people, but were more akin to the Lithuanians ethnographically. In 1226 the Polish Duke Conrad invited the Teutonic Order, the Knights of the Cross, into Poland to convert to Christianity these Prussians to the north, whose raids against the Poles were a constant threat. In payment for their work the knights were to receive, as subjects of the Polish king, a small territory adjoining Prussia, as well as the territories to be won from the Prussians.

The Teutonic Knights were efficient, if not Christian, in their methods, and it was not long till their main aim became, not the spreading of Christianity, but the advancement of Germanism. They subjugated Prussia by terror and cruelty and formed an independent state, refusing to acknowledge Polish sovereignty, in spite of their previous agreements. The Order continual-

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West of the Vistula the Poles were separated from the sea by the pagan Prussians, who were in no way connected with the German people, but were more akin to the Lithuanians ethnographically. In 1226 the Polish King Conrad invited the Teutonic Order, the Knights of the Cross, into Poland to convert to Christianity these Prussians to the north, whose raids against the Poles were a constant threat. In payment for their work the knights were to receive, as subjects of the Polish king, a small territory adjoining Prussia, as well as the territories to be won from the Prussians.

The Teutonic knights were efficient, if not Christian, in their methods, and it was not long till their main aim became not the spreading of Christianity, but the advancement of German aims. They subjected Prussia by force and cruelty and turned an independent state, refusing to acknowledge Polish sovereignty, in violation of their previous agreements. The order continued

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ly extended its possessions and, realizing the great economic importance of the Vistula mouth, they occupied the wealthy Polish city of Danzig in 1308 and massacred the entire Polish population.

The Knights also attempted to extend their conquests to Lithuania on the East. After the Union of Poland and Lithuania by the Treaty of Krewa in 1385, the Lithuanian and Polish Armies united in their resistance to the Knights and together they won a famous victory over the Knights at Grunwald in 1410. They failed, however, to take proper advantage of the victory, for although Danzig and the rest of Polish Pomerania were returned to Poland and remained Polish for more than three centuries, East Prussia remained in the hands of the Teutonic Knights, who became vassals of the Polish kings.

In 1525, Albert of Hohenzollern, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, turned Lutheran and transformed the lands of the Order into a secular duchy for himself and his heirs, to be held as fief of the Polish crown. Later the duchy, through lack of a direct heir, passed to the Berlin Hohenzollerns.

As a result of their annexation of what we now call East Prussia, the Germans created the same geographic phenomenon which later Germans so loudly protested: a portion of Poland lay between two portions of German-held territory. This separation continued till, by the first partition of Poland, Germans seized Polish Pomerania, thus making Prussian territory continuous along the Baltic. The name "Prussia" which they adopted from the lands to the east, has remained to this day an expression of the ruthlessness and treachery which characterized the Order of Teutonic Knights, as they characterize Hitler's New Order today. Even before Hitler's rise to power, the deeds of the Teutonic Knights were held up in modern Germany as the model for their descendants, and Marienburg, the stronghold of the Order, became a pilgrimage center to which German youth were taken on excursions, as part of their education.

The last century of the Teutonic Order was marked by a rapid extension of Polish influence which continued after the order disappeared. Polish manners, customs, and language crowded out German in all but a few northern towns; large numbers of Polish farmers came as colonists to the lake district. The mother of Albert, last Grand Master, was a Polish Princess. In the University of Konigsberg, founded in 1543, German and Polish languages were on an equal basis and Polish scholars occupied many positions on the faculty.

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the days of Bismarck, only to be renewed after the first World War. The Polish language was banned in the schools. The Polish inhabitants, landowners and small farmers, were, by one means or another, driven out, their places being taken by German colonists who came not from natural attraction to the province but under artificial stimulus.

East Prussia became the stronghold of aristocratic German landowners, those Junkers who made up the core of the militaristic clique which dominated Prussian affairs and in our days the entire German policy--a group of people who grew rich on the exploitation of the agricultural workers of East Prussia and on subsidies from the government, while at the same time, they had a large interest in industries in Germany proper. Of these, one news commentator remarked, when the Russian armies came near the East Prussian border a few months ago: "They are leaving their estates in haste, taking with them their jewel boxes and wine cellars, their fine clothes and expensive cars."

The Treaty of Versailles created an independent Poland, restoring to it Pomorze, which had been Polish for three hundred years before the partitions and which, in spite of efforts at Germanization, had remained very definitely Polish in character during the partitions. Danzig became a "free city"; East Prussia was given to Germany.

Because of its strategic position, in which lay its only real value to the Reich, East Prussia, during the years between the wars, was methodically made into a German military stronghold. On three separate occasions within the past 30 years, East Prussia has served as the base for a German aggressive campaign of serious consequences: in 1914, against Russia; in 1939, against Warsaw; in 1941, once more against Russia.

East Prussia is the symbol of the Prussian spirit; it is striking evidence to all Germans that utter and complete Germanization, at the expense of the tradition and culture of an area, are successful and profitable. So says Robert Machray, and he ends his book with these significant sentences: "So long as East Prussia remains a part of Germany there can be no possibility of a complete revolution in German policy and its emancipation from the dominant ideology. Contrariwise, separate East Prussia from Germany and the entire edifice built up by the Prussian Spirit will collapse and tumble down. And so the separation of East Prussia from Germany will be the most effective and expedient means of restoring the German nation to moral and political sanity."

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HOSPITAL ON WHEELS

The purchase of a 400-bed mobile hospital by the Paderewski Memorial Fund has already been mentioned in these pages. Did you stop to think, as you read, what a tremendous project it is? An entire hospital on wheels is one of those fantastic imaginings that has been translated into hard reality by modern production and planning. It may be of interest to know what the various government departments had to do with the assembling of this plant, as stated in a recent bulletin of the Paderewski Testimonial Fund:

"Surgeon General's department led the way; Secretary of War's department ordered the release; all technical services involved are cooperating to get the total assemblage to ship-side. Ordnance--22 trucks and trailers, including 6 ambulances; Quartermaster--59 tents, stoves, bathing unit, tool kits; Surgeon General's--drugs, sets of surgical instruments, complete hospital supplies, 400 folding cots, bedding mess, administration; Engineering--portable disinfectant, generator, lighting system; Chemical--dust respirators; Signal Corps--flashlights."

Your gift to the National War Fund, which includes Polish War Relief, helped buy this hospital, which will be used in connection with the Polish Hospital in Edinburgh and shipped to Poland when that country is liberated. Your gift this month will help pay operational expenses in the coming year.

Make your gift a generous one.

POLISH PROTESTANTISM

Nowhere is the Polish belief in the rights of the individual more strikingly demonstrated than in the tolerance which the Poles, though predominantly a devout Catholic people, have shown for the Protestants through the centuries. The great Chancellor, Jan Zamoyski, expressed not only his personal convictions, but those of the Polish people as a whole, when he said: "I would give half my life to see those who have abandoned Catholicism return to it, but I would give my whole life rather than have them return as the result of violence." Consequently, Poland passed through the Reformation Period without persecutions, massacres, or religious wars. Rather, Poland became a haven where foreign Protestants found shelter and protection. Ironically enough, this very freedom of conscience, of speech, and of the press, was one factor in the decline of the Reformation movement in that country. Among

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the Protestant sects was disunity, which might have disappeared if they had been drawn together by a common enemy. "On the banks of the Vistula," writes one chronicler, "the reformation lacked the stimulus of persecution."

The Lutherans and Calvinists both came early to Poland. In 1556 and 1557 the Antitrinitarians, who were considered "dissenters" by both Protestants and Catholics, and had been driven first from Italy, then from Switzerland, came in considerable numbers to Poland, till, in fact, most of the outstanding leaders of the denomination were in that country. At Rakow they set up their printing press from which their literature was distributed to all Europe. In the field of social ethics the Unitarians exerted the greatest influence in Poland of the three Protestant groups. They stood for apostolic communism; they were rich but renounced their privileges.

During Poland's years of independence between the two wars, the Protestant Church in Western Poland (the part under German control during the partitions) contained large numbers of German Fifth Columnists, and the German clergy, who were in the majority, tried in every way to undermine the authority of the Polish clergy and to hamper their work. In spite of this, the Polish Protestants remained patriotic Poles and their preachers and bishops did not hesitate to die in the concentration camps of the Nazis, rather than betray their country by supporting those German church officials who tried to put official Protestantism in the service of Nazi doctrine. The Polish Protestants have gone underground to practice their faith. The beautiful Lutheran Church in Warsaw was one of the first buildings to be deliberately bombed in 1939.

There has been published recently a pamphlet, "The Protestant Churches in Poland", with a preface by Prof. William J. Rose, Director of the School of Slavonic Studies in the University of London, which may be had by writing to the Editor of Comments.

EUROPE'S COMING GENERATION WILL NOT BE BORN

This is the startling title of an article in MAGAZINE DIGEST for August, 1944, adapted from medical reports, by Julian Gregory. Mr. Gregory's thesis briefly is this:

The German blitz killed millions of potential fathers. Famine has killed untold numbers of children and reduced others to impotency for life. Many mothers have become ster-

The Protestant sects were dissatisfied, which might have disappeared if it had been drawn together by a common enemy. "On the basis of the Visitation," writes one canonist, "the reform action lacked the stimulus of persecution."

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During Poland's years of independence between the two wars, the Protestant Church in Poland (the year under German control during the partitioning) contained large numbers of German fifth Columnists. Had the German clergy, who were in the majority, tried to work in any way to undermine the activity of the Polish clergy and to hinder their work, the spirit of this, the Polish Evangelical Church, would have been crushed. Their presence and cooperation and help to the cause of the reconstruction of the nation, rather than being their country as supporters of German fifth Columnists who tried to put official Protestantism in the service of Nazi doctrine. The Polish Protestants have gone underground to practice their faith. The beautiful Lutheran Church in Warsaw was one of the first buildings to be deliberately bombed in 1939.

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EUROPE'S GERMING CIVILIZATION WILL NOT BE BORN

This is the starting point of an article in MAGAZINE DIGEST for August, 1944, quoted from medical reports by Julian Gregory. Dr. Gregory's thesis briefly is this:

The German elite killed millions of potential leaders. Germany has killed untold numbers of children and reduced others to immaturity for life. Many mothers have become ster-

ile from hunger and will never bear children again, while many children born now are deformed on account of vitamin deficiency of the mother. Hunger is not temporary; for those who suffer too long, food can never restore normal health again. It is estimated that the total of Europe's unborn children on account of the war must now number several million.

In World War I Germans went hungry; in World War II the rest of Europe have gone doubly hungry to allow ample food for the master race. Thus there will be no sterility in Germany after the war. Even defeated, Germany will emerge stronger in population and potential population than any possible combination of her once-conquered neighbors.

There are available through

The Film Department of the Polish Government Information Center, two films which are of special interest:

Land of My Mother 3 reels, 35 & 16mm. sound, 23 min. 1943

Produced in Cinecolor with the commentary spoken by Miss Eve Curie. The film shows the landscape and architecture over various parts of Poland, and the commentary describes the historic background. (Study guide for teachers for classroom use furnished with film.)

Children in Refuge 1 reel, 35 & 16mm. sound, 9 min. 1944

Polish children who have escaped from Nazi persecution in Poland shown at work and play in camps set up for them for the duration in Persia, Palestine, Africa and Scotland.

This is a very good film to stimulate interest in the National War Fund.

These films will be loaned free of charge, provided that no admission is charged when they are shown. Please mention Comments on Polish Affairs when you write to:

PIC Films, Inc.
745 Fifth Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

100 Fifth Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.